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AUTHOR Rossmeier, Joseph G.
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ABSTRACT

Recently, Northern Virginia Community College has moved into a new era of institutional development, whereby primary attention to facility planning and increasing enrollments has given way to a comprehensive, program-based, and strategic planning process which transcends all elements of the institution. Recognition is given to the integral relationship planning has to management by including annual reviews and short-, mid-, and long-term planning. In addition, the importance of systematic evaluation, revision, and change of the plan and the necessity of executive commitment and faculty involvement are recognized. The development of the first Master Plan by a president-appointed task force followed the systematic steps of the planning process: establishing institutional mission; setting goals and objectives; assessing community needs and interests; assessing institutional current status; identifying programs which can be justified, approved, and implemented; calculating resource requirements; determining resource allocations; determining priorities and alternatives; and conducting qualitative and quantitative evaluations. It contains a list of planned educational and support services, immediate and long-range resource needs, projected campus missions, issues to be addressed, and a working calendar of the process. Observations about initiating a planning process and a bibliography are included. (AYC)

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Educational Master Planning: Creative or Cathartic?

Historically, Northern Virginia Community College could claim that it had possession of a master plan which was the result of the combined efforts of key college administrators and outside consultants. This plan, which was developed in the early days of the College, served to provide an overall direction for the College during its formative stage and did this exceptionally well. As were most master plans of community colleges in the late sixties-early seventies, the document focused primarily on facility planning, including location of campuses, campus size and program concentrations at each campus. Planning as a process was quite informal during this era, with major concern being placed on expected growth - new facilities, new programs and more dollars to support increasing enrollments.

More recently, NVCC, like most other colleges, has moved into a new era of institutional development, whereby primary attention to facility planning and increasing enrollments has given way to a comprehensive, program-based and strategic planning process which transcends all elements of the institution. The College senses the need to cope with a rapidly changing environment by instituting a more formal planning process--a process which is creative rather than cathartic.

The planning process can be ideally classified as an educational master planning process and includes the following systematic steps:

(1) Establishing institutional mission;

(2) Setting goals and objectives;

(3) Assessing community needs in terms of citizenry interests and manpower requirements;

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(4) Assessing institution's current status;

(5) Identifying programs which can be justified, approved and implemented;

(6) Calculating resource requirements;

(7) Determining how these resources can be allocated;

(8) Determining priorities and alternatives;

(9) Conducting evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative.

All planning efforts are being redirected to pursue the direction established by long range goals to include what the total institution hopes to achieve in the areas of instruction, public service, academic support, student support and institutional support. As a far reaching posture, the planning concept now is to re-direct thinking away from strictly methodology and nice sounding goals toward clear, creative, insightful and opportunistic decision-making to gain better control of the College's destiny. This strategic planning process places significant emphasis in the economic sense on the position of resources - fiscal, human, physical and intellectual - which must be coordinated and integrated to maximize opportunities in the institution's environment. Robert G. Cope (1978), in his recent book, Strategic Policy Planning, calls this aspect of strategic planning as "opportunity analysis."

Another aspect of the strategic planning concept within the College which is worthy of noting here concerns the relationship of planning to management. Without question, strategic planning is a basic function of management. Yet, strategic planning as a management function cannot be understood properly and implemented successfully without defining as to who or what constitutes administration, management, or even governance. To resolve this rather perplexing issue, al beit an intellectual brainstormer, Cope states that "decision making is synonomous with managing, which in

turn is synonomous with planning and governance." Since "strategic planning is the collective exercise of foresight," which in turn is required in all decisions, "planning becomes in practice identical with decision making on the part of those with management or policy making responsibilities." Thus, planning and management are deemed as inseparable components of modern management practice. Harold L. Enarson, President, Ohio State University (1975), verifies this concept by stressing that "planning is inseparable from management, and both involve those elements we associate with art - intuition, creativity, discernment, command of the work tools and materials, and appreciation of the interaction of form and function."

The College recognizes the integral relationship planning has to management. As an example of this recognition, the educational master planning process at NVCC includes (1) annual reviews and revisions of short-term plans, as provided by various management working calendars, (2) short-term and mid-term planning as provided in the annual mission, goals and objectives statements updates, and (3) long-range planning performed in biennial cycles. These three sub-processes entail both formulation -- determining what has to be done -- and implementation -- coordinating whatever has been determined to do -- activities, thus depicting the marriage between planning and management.

The short-term plans are responses to immediate needs for changes and adjustments which can be accomplished within one or two years. Various working calendars contain specific tasks and provide deadlines for submitting and reviewing proposals for such short-term plans to adjust routine management functions.

Non-routine management functions--those tasks that are identified for additional attention beyond the normal administrative requirements--are planned for one-year or multi-year accomplishment in the mission,

goals and objectives statements, revised and published annually. Both faculty and administrators participate in the preparation of this document, which specifies college-level objectives and responsibilities, and are involved in the evaluation of results to use in future planning.

The six-year master plan is prepared and published in a biennial cycle which begins with a review of the current Educational Master Planning Resource document, proceeds with a thorough analysis of the College's status and trends, and concludes with an adjustment of present plans and the preparation of another two years beyond the present six-year planning time-frame.

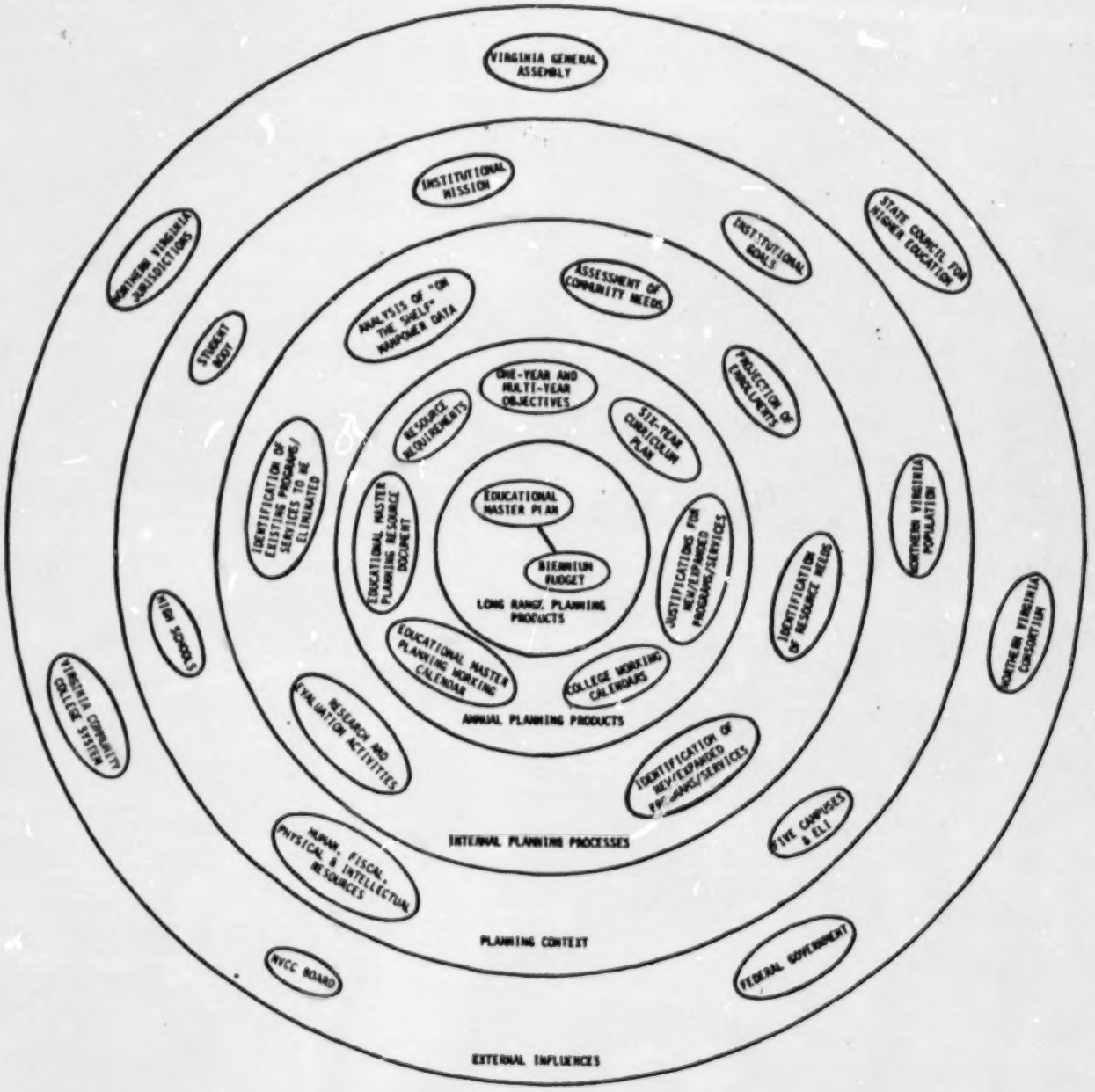
The long-range biennial planning cycle is incorporated into the educational master planning working calendar. This calendar includes all activities related to the nine steps cited earlier, including enrollment and staff projections, the approval process for proposed new and expanded curricula and for eliminating existing curricula, updates to educational specifications of campus facilities and preparation of the biennium budget.

Through the educational master planning process, the College is able to systematize its forward looking posture in terms of citizenry interests and manpower requirements of the service area, growth projections for the service area, enrollment projections for the College and for each campus, projected campus thrusts and anticipated new and expanded educational programs and support services. From these requirements, immediate and long-range resource needs are determined.

As mentioned earlier, the College has just completed its first Educational Master Plan. It is important to distinguish between this plan and the planning process just described. Keep in mind that a plan should result from a process which encompasses a wide spectrum of strategic planning linkages like those shown in Figure I. It is important

Figure I

STRATEGIC PLANNING LINKAGES



to identify all linkages which pertain to external influences, such as the Federal government, state legislature, state agencies, local jurisdictions, and the College Board; the college's planning context such as institutional mission and goals, organization structure, resources, student body, local population, and high schools; internal planning processes, annual planning products and long range planning products. Whatever the merits of a planning process it is possible to have a plan which does not evolve from a cyclical planning process. This approach is usually not desirable for a number of reasons.

First, in the past, too often consultants have been hired to develop a master plan through a one-shot effort. While such a plan would be relevant for a short period of time, there is no mechanism for updating this plan on a regular basis. Usually if executive management wants to develop a master plan through a cyclical planning process, such an undertaking should probably occur through an in-house team effort. Second, an in-house planning process development increases the chances of a higher quality first draft of the master plan. Further, the involvement of individuals who are "where the action is" increases the effectiveness of planning and increases commitment to institutional goals and objectives. With an open, observable and accountable planning process, the master plan can be evaluated, revised and changed on a systematic basis to meet changing conditions and needs.

A third factor to be considered in developing an effective educational master planning process is the need for executive commitment. For planning to be successful, the President and top level administrators must be fully involved in the planning process and the depth of executive commitment must be unequivocally impressed on all administrative staff and faculty. It is questionable whether administrative staff and faculty

can be assured of this top-down commitment unless executive management is actively involved in the planning process. Any institution that is desirous to be recognized as the vanguard of strategic planning must invariably be led by executive management who insist on clearly defined and articulated goals, and who are dedicated to implementing those goals through a rational plan. Strong executive involvement also helps to reduce the sting of the additional time commitment which most staff will experience in a strategic planning environment. A comprehensive planning thrust will inevitably lead to staff becoming more task oriented in their work habits.

The current planning process at NVCC began in Fall 1975 with the appointment of an Educational Master Planning Task Force by the President. The Task Force's first tasks were to develop mission and goals statements, followed by the development of one-year and multi-year institutional objectives. The Task Force then went on to complete an assessment of community needs based on both citizenry occupation and on job-demand of industries/businesses/governmental agencies located in the immediate service area of the College as well as in the larger Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area of Washington, D.C. Since a sufficient amount of current and relevant "on the shelf" manpower data was already available from various local, state and national agencies in the Washington area, it was decided not to conduct a community needs assessment to determine the citizenry interests at that particular time. Such a massive undertaking would have depleted staff resources and thus would have impeded development of the planning process in a reasonable amount of time.

The "on the shelf" manpower data was subsequently analyzed and summarized and incorporated into an Educational Master Planning Resource document which the Office of Institutional Research has been delegated responsibility for maintaining and updating annually. This resource

document is a compilation of statistical data and detailed analyses of individual datum components of the student body, educational and support services, resources and the relationship among the College, the student body and the service area. These analyses can be viewed as a periodic self-assessment of institutional performance over a wide-range of specific goals to fulfill the need for self-analysis as well as public accountability. The obvious purpose of the resource document is to serve as a principal factual basis to both the planning process and the master plan.

Now let me say just a few words about the plan itself. Determining the contents of this plan turned out to be an extremely arduous and laborious task for several reasons.

First, the Task Force had to decide to what target group the plan would be directed. After considerable deliberation, legislators, state agency officials and local College Board members were identified as the primary target group with College administrators and faculty and local citizens being the next important group.

Second, with the target groups identified it was decided that the College would be best served by a rather polished document which would be limited to not more than 75 pages. Emphasis was to be placed on the preparation of a clear, concise and readable document.

Third, data in the voluminous tables of the resource document had to be analyzed and presented in condensed yet understandable form.

The first master plan emanating from the planning process described earlier will not go down in history as one of mankind's greatest achievements, nor is it likely to be labeled as a white elephant. Of particular interest and value to the College, the Educational Master Plan does contain (1) a list of proposed new and expanded educational and support services through 1986 including degree and certificate offerings; (2) immediate and long range resource needs; (3) projected campus missions;

(4) various significant issues which the College must address and resolve in the next few years and of course, (5) a working calendar of the educational master planning process. The significant issues identified include (1) Projected Campus Size - Optimum Campus Size, (2) Control of Course Distribution by Campus, (3) Establishment and Implementation Procedures of Curricula and (4) Campus Service Areas.

In summary, I wish to point out some observations about initiating a planning process and its development.

(1) Executive commitment must be more than just endorsement; it must mean involvement.

(2) Keep the Task Force effort to no more than 18 months.

(3) There must be an energizer, usually the chief planning officer, who guides a planning task force through planning activities successfully to the point of a written document.

(4) Participation on the planning task force should become a privilege in the eyes of the College community.

(5) The planning process must be developed as a regular part of institutional activity. Planning cannot be run by a committee or one individual but eventually must be diffused throughout the organization.

(6) A participative process should be developed in a planning cycle. But reluctant participants can easily impede or sabotoge efficient planning, therefore, establish a working calendar to keep the process moving.

(7) Planning must be future directed and continuously re-evaluated in light of changing conditions and changing community tastes and preferences.

(8) A master planning process must be cyclical to allow for an institution's master plan to be reviewed and updated every two years.

(9) A six year master plan would be a reasonable time period in which to project the future. One exception to this may be the area of facilities where campus plans may extend to eight or even ten years into the future.

(10) A master plan is only as good as the data base from which the future is projected. High quality, factual information must be accessible.

(11) Planning should be viewed as flexible and dynamic. Keep in mind that planning can curtail vision because while planning emphasizes order, vision is not necessarily order.

(12) Probably most important, keep the planning process simple. Sophisticated methodologies often do nothing more than keep participants so immersed with irrelevant tasks, a master plan is either never completed or completed haphazardly.

(13) Use institutional staff to develop both a planning process and a plan. Restrict consultants to specific tasks when added manpower is required but ensure that staff are in control of effort at all times.

(14) Projections of the future environment in which the organization will find itself must be based on more than just present and past conditions.

Joseph G. Rossmeier
Director of Planning, Research
and Management Services
Northern Virginia Community College
8333 Little River Turnpike
Annandale, Virginia 22003
(703) 323-3106

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